

MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT/Office of Public Information

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SUPREME COURT ANNOUNCES WAYNE CIRCUIT CHIEF JUDGE APPOINTMENTS

LANSING, MI, November 29, 2001 – The Michigan Supreme Court released today the names of chief judges who will head Wayne County Circuit Court for the next two years.

For the first time, the high Court has appointed two judges to serve as co-chiefs of Wayne County Circuit Court. Judge Mary Beth Kelly, the presiding judge of Wayne County Circuit Court Family Division, and Judge Timothy M. Kenny, of the court's Criminal Division, will share responsibility for the state's largest trial court. The Supreme Court also appointed Judge Pamela R. Harwood of the Wayne County Civil Division as Chief Judge Pro Tem. Ordinarily, a chief judge pro tem is selected by the chief judge of the court.

"Wayne County Circuit is an immense court, with immense responsibilities for a chief judge," said Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Maura D. Corrigan. "Our court has chosen three people who complement each other well in their skills and experience. I have the greatest confidence that they will meet the many challenges facing Wayne County Circuit."

Corrigan added that outgoing Wayne County Circuit Chief Judge Michael F. Sapala, who announced earlier this month that he was withdrawing his name from consideration in the chief judge selection process, "dealt successfully with some very difficult assignments, including overseeing the legislative merger of Detroit Recorder's Court and Wayne County Circuit in 1997. He's labored hard, long, and well, and I thank him for it."

With 64 judges, Wayne Circuit is far and away the state's largest trial court. Wayne Circuit's criminal division alone, with 30 judges, is larger than the entire Oakland County Circuit bench which, with 17 judges, is the state's second-largest trial court.

In 2000, 101,557 new cases were filed in Wayne County Circuit. The Wayne County Friend of the Court has 218,000 of the state's child support enforcement cases.

Kenny, who has been a judge since 1996, has received the highest ratings by the Detroit Metropolitan Bar Association and the Wolverine Bar Association, an organization of African-American attorneys. His legal experience includes serving as a prosecutor for over 20 years in Wayne County. He is chairman of the Wayne County Criminal Advocacy Program's Board of Directors.

Before coming to the Wayne County bench in 1999, Kelly was an partner with the Detroit-based law firm of Dickinson Wright, where her practice included commercial litigation. Her areas of expertise include securities fraud and antitrust law. Corrigan noted that Kelly's background "makes her admirably suited to address Wayne County Circuit's budget issues."

Harwood, who has served on the Wayne County Circuit bench since 1989, was a judge of the 36th District Court in Detroit from 1985 to 1989. She was named one of “Top Ten Judges” in southeastern Michigan in 1995, and has received the highest ratings from the Detroit Metropolitan Bar Association and the Wolverine Bar Association. Harwood’s areas of expertise include managing large caseloads; she designed and implemented an asbestos docket management plan for hundreds of cases in which she presided from 1989-92.

“Wayne County certainly faces a number of challenges,” said Kenny. “But I am confident that, with Judge Kelly and Judge Harwood, we’ll meet those challenges.”

“I’m grateful for the opportunity to serve the families of Wayne County in this new capacity,” said Kelly. “One of our goals is to bring additional resources to the family division.”

Other goals for the Wayne Circuit Court include:

- continuing to improve Friend of the Court services;
- eliminating the court’s budget deficit;
- speeding the progress of cases; and
- eliminating overcrowding at the Wayne County jail.

Under Michigan Court Rule (MCR) 8.110, “[t]he Supreme Court shall select a judge of each trial court to serve as chief judge.” The selection process, which takes place in each odd-numbered year, permits each trial court with two or more judges to submit the names of no fewer than two judges as candidates for chief judge. The chief judges will serve a two-year term, starting January 1, 2002.

Under MCR 8.110, chief judges serve as their court’s representatives in dealing with the public, the news media, the legal community, and other government agencies. Chief judges oversee other judges and court staff, supervise caseloads and court finances, and set their courts’ hours and work policies.

The Supreme Court also named chief judges to the state’s other trial courts. Judge William C. Whitbeck, a Lansing resident, was appointed to serve as chief judge of the Michigan Court of Appeals. Judge Peter J. Maceroni will continue to serve as chief judge of Macomb County Circuit Court. Judge Joan E. Young, Chief Judge of Oakland County Circuit Court, has also been appointed to another term as chief judge of that court.

This press release, and the order naming the new chief judges, may be viewed at www.supremecourt.mi.us.
